UNITED
NATIONS

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Economic and Social Council

Distr.
LIMITED

E/CONF.85/L.98
1 September 1992

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

SIXTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE
ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
New York, 25 August-3 September 1992
Agenda item 15

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE CONFERENCE

Draft report

Chapter I

Organization of the Conference

A. Terms of reference

1. The Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names was held at the United Nations Headquarters from 25 August to 3 September 1992, in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 1988/116 of 25 May 1988.

B. Opening of the Conference

2. On behalf of the Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Economic and Social Development, Mr. Ji Chaozhu, the Director of the Science, Technology, Energy, Environment and Natural Resources Division, Mrs. Dunja Pastizzi-Ferencic, opened the Conference and welcomed delegates.

3. In her opening address, the Director referred to the foresight of the United Nations 25 years ago in convening the first United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in 1967. She referred to the present information age, and the importance of communication and information technologies, which increasingly affect all aspects of today's society. She stressed the new role of cartography in the service of economic and social development. Current world realities and the requirements posed by

sustainable development, she said, placed new challenges before the Conference. The world, she added, relied on the collective wisdom and expertise of Conference members to find the most effective ways to transliterate and standardize geographical names to avoid misunderstanding and facilitate world-wide communication. The Director referred to successful cooperation among countries in the standardization of geographical names and also to the benefits accruing from training courses in toponymy and from various national activities.

4. The Director referred to the Department of Economic and Social Development of the United Nations Secretariat, which was created in March 1992 to increase the effectiveness of the Secretariat in addressing the social and economic priorities of Member States. The new Department, it was explained, expanded and enhanced technical cooperation in a wide range of activities, including the standardization of geographical names. In conclusion, the Director stated that increased public awareness of the activities of the Conference would help to strengthen the effectiveness of the United Nations system at the international and national levels.

C. Attendance

5. The Conference was attended by 160 representatives and by observers from 66 countries, and by 6 specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations, as well as 3 international scientific organizations. The list of participants is presented in annex I.

D. Election of the President

6. The Conference elected Mr. Abdelhadi Tazi (Morocco) as its President. Mr. Tazi expressed his sincerest gratitude for the honour and the trust given him by the Conference. He briefly outlined Muslim contributions to geographical knowledge of the world throughout most of recorded history, including those of Yacut Al-Hamawi, who compiled a unique volume on geographical names, Al Idrisi and Ibn Battuta, all pioneers in geography.

E. Adoption of the rules of procedure

7. The Conference adopted the provisional rules of procedure as contained in document E/CONF.85/2 (see annex II).

F. Adoption of the agenda

8. The Conference adopted the provisional agenda, with minor amendments, as contained in document E/CONF.85/1 (see annex III).

G. Election of officers other than president

9. The Conference elected the following officers:

First Vice-President:	Mr. Richard R. RANDALL (United States of America)
Second Vice-President:	Mr. Hamid MALMIRIAN (Iran, Islamic Republic of)
Third Vice-President:	Mr. WANG Jitong (China)
Rapporteur:	Mr. Art O MAOLFABHAIL (Ireland)
Editor-in-Chief:	Ms. Helen KERFOOT (Canada)

H. Organization of work

10. Officers for three Committees of the Conference were also elected as follows:

Committee I: National programmes

Chairman:	Mr. William A. ROBERTSON (New Zealand)
Vice-Chairman:	Mr. Ernst SPIESS (Switzerland)
Rapporteur:	Mr. Pergiran Haji Matusin MATASAN (Brunei Darussalam)

Committee II: Technical programmes

Chairman:	Ms. Ann-Christin MATTISSON (Sweden)
Vice-Chairman:	Ms. Sylvie LEJEUNE (France)
Rapporteur:	Mr. Roger L. PAYNE (United States of America)

Committee III: International programmes

Chairman:	Mr. Peter E. RAPER (South Africa)
Vice-Chairman:	Mr. Naftali KADMON (Israel)
Rapporteur:	Ms. Pamela M. OPIE-SMITH (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)

I. Documentation

11. A list of documents submitted to the Conference is contained in annex IV.

J. Credentials of representatives to the Conference

12. The Credentials Committee, composed of the President, the three Vice-Presidents, the Rapporteur, the Editor-in-Chief, and the Executive Secretary of the Conference (ex officio), reported that the credentials of all delegates were found to be in order.

Chapter II

Summary of the work of the Conference

A. Plenary meetings

Reports by divisions and Governments on the situation in their regions and countries and on the progress made in the standardization of geographical names since the Fifth Conference (item 4)

13. The report of the Eastern Mediterranean Division (other than Arabic) (E/CONF.85/L.3) pointed out that the official romanization system for Hebrew was used by all government agencies in Israel, but that many agencies within the private sector still employed different conversion methods. The widespread occurrence and treatment of exonyms derived from the Bible was also addressed.

14. Austria reported (E/CONF.85/L.8) that a working group had been established on the spelling of geographical names in Austrian teaching materials. In response to a query, the delegate reported that agreement on the spelling of names in South Tyrol had not been reached between German language experts in Austria and Switzerland and Italian language experts in Italy.

15. The report by Romania (E/CONF.85/L.19) stated that toponymic activity had increased since the last conference and in recent years work on standardization had been undertaken in close conjunction with mapping activities.

16. The report by South Africa (E/CONF.85/L.22) indicated that contact had been made with the Economic Commission for Africa and concern was expressed over the non-participation by some African countries in the activities of the Group of Experts. Efforts were being made by South Africa to assist neighbouring countries in organizing national toponymic programmes.

17. Sweden reported (E/CONF.85/L.24) that the use of exonyms in cartography had been reduced, but that educators and the media had differing views on the matter. The report also addressed the treatment of Saami and Finnish names in multilingual areas.

18. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland reported (E/CONF.85/L.31) that geographical names were now standardized for all 1:50,000 and 1:100,000 scale government maps. The Permanent Committee on Geographical Names had been involved with government authorities of the Maldives to romanize the Maldivian language names. Gazetteers for use by official bodies in the United Kingdom are produced by the use of computer technology.

19. The Romano-Hellenic Division (E/CONF.85/L.33) reported on a meeting held in Paris in 1990. Most of the work concentrated on the subject of exonyms, including the preparation of a document showing exonyms used in each language of the division for the names of countries, capitals, and administrative regions.

20. France reported (E/CONF.85/L.34) that the standardization of geographical names continued in several areas: the updating of the basic map at 1:25,000 scale and with the publication of general maps; the refinement and development of various geographic and cartographic databases; and general research and preparation of lists of geographical names. In response to an inquiry, it was said that there were occasional name differences on maps produced by mapping bodies and it seemed impossible to guarantee absolute consistency in orthography because of dialectal variation.

21. The Dutch- and German-speaking Division reported (E/CONF.85/L.36) on meetings held in 1989, 1990 and 1991. Much attention had been devoted to the United Nations glossary of terms used for the standardization of geographical names. On another matter, it was stated that the Government of the Netherlands would be willing to provide half the cost of a two-week training course in toponymy for African participants, if the United Nations would secure the other half.

22. The report of the East, Central and South-East Europe Division (E/CONF.85/L.39) made the point that the problem of exonyms had always been the subject most discussed at meetings. Most countries of the division supported the donor principle. The United Kingdom remarked that romanization that does not consider the interests of the receiver language was not to be recommended. The delegate of Czechoslovakia, who presented the division report, agreed with this. He also stated that for some languages used within the division, a romanization system did not exist. This situation should be noted and those countries involved needed to be presented with relevant resolutions of the Conference.

23. The report of Canada (E/CONF.85/L.41) referred to a wide variety of subjects, among them the goals of its national names authority: dissemination of toponymic information, the field recording of geographical names, the automation of toponymic databases and data availability, and the development

of national policies and procedures for geographical naming in the official and aboriginal languages of Canada.

24. The report of New Zealand (E/CONF.85/L.58) stated that the occurrence of Maori names predominated in the North Island, whereas English names were in the majority in the South Island. In general, Maori names referred to physical features, such as rivers and mountains, and English names applied to settlements. The policy of New Zealand was to reflect the history and culture and to preserve original Maori place-names.

25. Iran (Islamic Republic of) (E/CONF.85/L.60) reported on progress made since the Fifth Conference. The Central National Geographical Names Authority was reorganized within the National Geographical Organization. A new village identification booklet had been published and about 6,500 names had been collected in the field, in connection with the production of map sheets at 1:250,000 scale. Those had been added to the names database, bringing the total number of computerized records to 44,000. A list of name changes and new names within the country and a revised list of country names in the Farsi language were presented.

26. Switzerland (E/CONF.85/L.37) reported that although a 1970 Federal decree placed name authority responsibility in each of the 26 cantons, steps were being taken to establish a national geographical names authority. This would coordinate canton names commissions, function as an advisory body to the federal Government, and represent the country at international meetings. Other items reported were the collection and treatment of names, complicated by the existence of four national languages in the country, and the initial development of a geographical names database based on the National Topographic Map Series.

27. The report of the Asia South-East and Pacific South-West Division (E/CONF.85/L.59) noted that the next meeting of the Division was planned for later in 1992 and that non-member nations would be invited. It was reported that New Zealand was preparing a place-names map of the division area that would show official names as recommended by each country. Malaysia remarked that some countries that should be included in the division had not responded to approaches made to them.

28. A videotape illustrating toponymic field work was presented by Finland. Copies of this videotape can be obtained from the Finnish Research Centre for Domestic Languages.

29. The report of Finland (E/CONF.85/L.68) described the objectives of and progress in field collection of toponyms, and announced the beginning of a toponymic data file in 1991. The use of foreign names in the Finnish mass media was often at variance with the recommendations of the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names. The seventeenth International Congress of Onomastic Sciences was held in Helsinki in 1990. A gazetteer of inhabited places in Finland, containing about 25,000 entries, was published in 1990. Finland stated that the videotape was intended for

training courses and to provide information on the state of progress in standardization, but had only limited distribution abroad so far.

30. The report of the Russian Federation (E/CONF.85/L.18) listed the principal activities of the Permanent Joint Committee on Geographical Names during the years 1987-1991. The joint Committee was prepared to cooperate with names authorities in other countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

31. The report of Hungary (E/CONF.85/L.69) stated that the Committee on Geographical Names was a decision-making and advisory body set up by government order in 1990. The introduction of large collective farms had tended to obliterate traditional names but this trend was reversing. The changing of street names had become an important issue.

32. Japan reported (E/CONF.85/L.71) that it had no single central agency for officially dealing with names. Many newly discovered undersea features as well as Antarctic features had been named. No progress was reported on romanization.

33. For the first time Estonia presented a report (E/CONF.85/L.75). Most Estonian names, which had previously transliterated into Cyrillic characters, have reverted to their original form. Estonia hosted a regional meeting of the Baltic States on the standardization of geographical names in 1992. This was the first such meeting.

34. Czechoslovakia reported (E/CONF.85/L.82) that a standardizing authority had not yet been established although both the Czechs and the Slovaks had advisory boards. As regards romanization of names from the nations of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the romanized Russian forms would probably be used. The GOST 83 system was being only partially applied in the former Soviet Union. This has led to hesitancy in the use of this system. Czechoslovakia planned to issue a domestic version of the Technical Terminology glossary.

35. Norway reported a large number of activities on names standardization (E/CONF.85/L.83) and mentioned in particular a new law relating to geographical names. Norway mentioned also a documentation project at the University of Oslo that was transferring earlier collected names material from archive cards to electronic data files.

36. The report of the Netherlands (E/CONF.85/L.89) stated that no official national geographical names authority existed there. Since the last Conference, map-based gazetteers have been revised. Experts from the Netherlands took part in a number of training courses in toponymy.

37. Ukraine in its report (E/CONF. 85/L.91) stressed the importance of geographical names to the new State established in 1991. At present there was still a lack of standardization of orthography in the Ukrainian language. Ukraine also expressed its wish to join the East Central and South-East Europe Division of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.

38. Germany reported (E/CONF.85/L.92) that as a result of the unification of the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic a supplementary volume to the Gazetteer of the Federal Republic of Germany (1981) was in preparation. This would lead to a unified gazetteer based on a map at scale 1:500,000. A new edition of typonymic guidelines for map and other editors (E/CONF.85/93) necessitated by the unification was already submitted to the Conference. It was reported that work on German place-names in the Antarctic area was being maintained.

39. The United States of America/Canada Division in its report (E/CONF.85/L.95) recorded continuing cooperation between the two members who had reached consensus concerning the names of geographical features common to both with a view to reducing possible confusion in feature identification. A document had been agreed in 1988 which identified principles and procedures. Close contact had also been maintained in matters such as automated processing, treatment of aboriginal/nature geographical names and, various projects of the Group of Experts.

40. Jordan in its report (Working paper 1) stated that until recently maps of Jordan were of British and American provenance and that it had been the custom to translate these into Arabic. Many errors had arisen in the Arabic names on these maps. In the early 1980s the Royal Jordanian Geographic Centre adopted a transliterization system which was based on the Modified Bayrut System. Concerning future work, stress was laid on the special difficulties attending the collection of names in desert areas and on the vital need for a unified Roman transliteration system throughout the Arabic speaking countries.

41. Indonesia in its report (E/CONF.85/L.96) stressed the difficulty of producing a gazetteer for such a large multi-ethnic country with a long history of human settlement. A computerized gazetteer for one area was proposed as a national standard. The field work will be expedited by use of hand-held instruments using the global-positioning system.

42. In two papers (Working papers 5 and 6) Venezuela referred to the various phases of activity in a pilot scheme of standardization, including preparation, field-work, evaluation and particularly with reference to indigenous names and to frontier toponymy. A National Commission for Geographical Names had been established by law in 1992. Gazetteers based on a map at 1:1000,000 and 1:250,000 existed and a Dictionary of Geographic Names for Venezuela in 23 volumes was in process, with additional volumes for names in aboriginal languages.

43. Ireland, in Working paper 29, reported that a concise bilingual gazetteer had been published in 1989 and that a series of more detailed gazetteers was in process. Since 1987 full-time research into regional Irish-language forms of geographical names had been maintained by the Government of the United Kingdom in Northern Ireland. There is professional collaboration with this project. Urban names have since 1982 been regarded as geographical names and bilingual guidelines for standardization were issued in 1992.

44. The Celtic Division (Working paper 48) reported that since the Fifth Conference France has joined the Division.

45. Cyprus reported (Working paper 36) that since the Fifth Conference the obligatory use of Romanization System ELOT 743 had beer sanctioned. To facilitate the use of the system software packages were available, which accomplished the conversion automatically. It was further stated that in Cyprus a large number of names had been replaced by names in the Turkish language.

46. China, in Working paper 35, reported progress since the Fifth Conference. The China Committee on Geographical Names decided in 1988 to carry out supplementary investigation and updating of geographical names all over the country. Principles for the Standardization of Chinese Place Names have been drawn up by the Committee. Training courses in toponymy have also been organized and documents relating to these are being issued in translation as well as in Chinese.